

**Thema version 1.3**

**Basic User Instructions**

**April 2018**

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There is an accompanying document, Thema version 1.3 Worked Examples, updated independently of these User Instructions, which illustrates how selected titles could be classified.

1. **Introduction**

   Thema is intended as a multilingual subject classification scheme for book content, for use with digital and physical products, for all sectors of the global book, audiobook and e-book trade, and for both online and physical ‘bricks and mortar’ retail sectors. It consists of several thousand hierarchically-arranged subject categories and qualifiers, each with a descriptive heading (in many languages) and a language-independent code. The scheme is free to use and is maintained and managed by EDItEUR in association with the Thema International Steering Committee.

   The first full release of the scheme, Thema version 1.0, was launched in October 2013; Thema version 1.1, incorporating additions and modifications to headings only, was released a year later in November 2014. Thema 1.2 was released in June 2016. Thema 1.3 was released in April 2018. The various additions and refinements introduced in each revision were based on proposals from national Thema user groups, arising from real-world use of the scheme, translation work and comparisons with older national schemes. Each proposal was considered and ratified by the Thema international steering committee prior to updating the scheme. The nature and scope of the changes mean that all code values in v1.0, v1.1 and v1.2 are still valid in v1.3.

   An executive briefing, detailed Excel files of the complete scheme in various languages, as well as versions in xml, html and json, mappings from other schemes to Thema and further supporting documentation can be found at [http://www.editeur.org/151/Thema](http://www.editeur.org/151/Thema).

   An interactive multilingual search tool can be found at [https://ns.editeur.org/thema](https://ns.editeur.org/thema).
The browser is a useful tool for any Thema user as it displays the codes, the headings and the notes and enables browsing of the full hierarchy in an easy-to-understand fashion. It also has a search option that helps find the right code for a particular subject, and the notes and cross-references are easy to view. You can also examine how headings have been translated or what an original English language heading is.

These Basic User Instructions are not intended to provide comprehensive guidelines, but simply to outline the fundamental principles of Thema subject classification. Detailed usage notes are included in the scheme itself for a number of values.

2. Composition of the Thema scheme

The Thema subject classification scheme comprises the following elements:

- Subject Categories, arranged over 20 sections as listed in Part 4b below, and
- Qualifiers, in six lists covering various facets, as listed in Part 4c below.

Of these elements, only a Subject Category is mandatory for the classification of a book, e-book or audiobook; optional Qualifiers may be used in conjunction with Subject Categories to supplement and qualify or refine the meaning of the applied Subject Categories as required. A book can be classified using a single Subject Category, or multiple Subject Categories, and may have none, one or many Qualifiers added. However, a Qualifier can never be used on its own.

Each Subject Category or Qualifier consists of a code and a heading, which is always available in English, and may additionally be available in several other languages as translations are completed and approved. Many entries also have associated usage notes, and ‘see also’ cross-references to other Thema categories, to encourage consistent application of the categories.

Codes and headings are arranged in a hierarchical pattern to simplify classification and manual browsing and searching for topics.

Subject Category codes are of variable length (depth in the hierarchy), and always begin with a letter, e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Heading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>The Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Crime &amp; mystery fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NH</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGB</td>
<td>Web graphics &amp; design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YBC</td>
<td>Children’s picture books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QRRF</td>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LWKF</td>
<td>Shariah law: family relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNBB1</td>
<td>Autobiography: business &amp; industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFKC3</td>
<td>Embryology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualifier codes are of variable length and always begin with an integer number, *e.g.*

- **1HFGU** Uganda
- **2ACSC** Icelandic
- **3MD** 16th century, c 1500 to c 1599
- **4GH** For International GCSE (IGCSE)
- **5AG** Interest age: from c 6 years
- **6BA** Baroque

In product metadata records and message formats such as ONIX, only the code is required to be communicated, which can then be translated by recipients as appropriate. This is important: typically, a publisher or bibliographic classifier is working with a particular translation of the *Thema* scheme specific to a language or country, but since the codes are universal, the heading can be presented in any other translation, for example the consumer’s or librarian’s preferred language.

The set of Subject Categories is universally applicable and common to all language translations of the *Thema* scheme. The Qualifiers contain ‘shared values’ which are similarly common to all translations. They may also contain ‘National Extensions’ which typically relate to very specific topics identified as important in certain countries, but are presumed not to be of universal interest or applicability. The National Extension concept is designed to enable a global scheme to be relevant at a local or national level. The rules for applying National Extension Qualifiers are exactly the same as for shared value Qualifiers.

National Extension Qualifier codes are of variable length, but always have a stem which is a shared value. The stem is followed by the ISO Country Code (or an equivalent), hyphen-delimited, and then possibly by further letters: *e.g.*

- **1DNS-SE-BH** Västergötland, Sweden
- **3MPBGJ-ES-B** Spain: Civil war (1936–1939)
- **4Z-US-** For US educational curricula *(note the trailing hyphen)*
- **4Z-GB-SD** For Scottish Curriculum National 5
- **5HC-US-A** US Independence Day

However, not every user of *Thema* needs to recognise, understand or use every National Extension: they may decide that some or all National Extensions are too detailed and may choose to ignore them. The procedures for handling the receipt of ‘unknown’ National Extensions are explained below.

N.B. the use of an ISO Country Code in the structure of the national qualifiers does not mean that the code can only be used by or in that country or ‘belongs’ in some way to that country alone. A national extension can be used by anyone for whom it is relevant. So, as an example, the French group proposed a code for the Mont Blanc Massif (1DZTA-FR-B) but this does not mean that this is only the part of the Mont Blanc Massif that’s in France. 1DZTA-FR-B indicates the whole massif, including the section in Italy. The core code is 1DZTA – The Alps. Similarly, the code proposed by the US group, 5PB-US-F, Relating to Creole people, does not apply only to Creole people in the US but could be used for any Creole people, in Latin America, the Caribbean and so on. This code could be used in conjunction with a Place qualifier to give it a more geographically precise meaning if necessary.
3. Resolution of National Extensions

As shown above, all National Extension codes are suffixes, beginning at the first hyphen, that are added to ordinary shared value Qualifier codes. If a user encounters or receives a National Extension code that is not known or recognised, it can be resolved to a meaningful value by truncating the code string back to the shared value stem before the first hyphen.

Thus, if a user does not recognise Canadian National Extensions,

1KBC-CA-SGA  Central Saskatchewan: Saskatoon

is resolved and understood as

1KBC  Canada

which is meaningful and correct (although less precise).

In the case of some national extensions, for example particular educational purpose qualifiers, there are two options:

4Z-DE-FCB  For German integrated vocational training preparation

A user could truncate this code to just the 4Z-DE-, which indicates it is for German educational curricula. Or it could be 4Z – which just indicates that it is a title for a specific educational curriculum (without being specific as to which curriculum).

This resolution process can be done manually, or automatically by the application of simple rules to manipulate incoming data.

4. Allocation of Thema Subject Categories and Qualifiers

4a. General rules of Thema classification

The basic rules for assigning Thema Subject Categories and Qualifiers, put most simply, are as follows:

**Rule 1: Ensure the first Category entered is the primary or main subject**

Taking advantage of all available information about the subject and scope of the work, ensure the first Category indicates the single most pertinent and important subject of the work.

**Rule 2: Classify titles as precisely as applicable or as broadly as required**

If a book is solely concerned with a specific topic defined by a single Category, use that precise code only; if it is broad-ranging in its scope within a single subject area, use a single broad Category rather than listing all the more specific Categories listed beneath it (see Note A below). Not every title has to be assigned the most detailed possible Category, only the most detailed that is applicable.
**Rule 3: Assign as many Categories as are required**

If the book covers several subject areas, assign relevant Categories from across the *Thema* scheme to indicate this, as many as are required. Only assign Categories for subjects that the book is substantially about as a whole, not for subjects that are peripheral or are pertinent in only a small part of the work.

There is no single ‘right number’ of subject categories to add. Some books need only a single subject code to clearly describe what the book is about, and others need more to indicate the breadth of their subject matter (and see Note B below).

Normally, fiction and non-fiction categories are mutually exclusive. But in *Thema*, in describing a fiction book, it is possible to add subsidiary non-fiction categories to add nuance about the subject, setting or milieu of the story. A few other subject categories within fiction – for example the ‘special features’ and ‘narrative themes’ codes also act somewhat like qualifiers, in that they add detail and should never be used as the only subject category.

**Rule 4: Observe any scope notes and instructions.**

In the hierarchical listing, many Categories (and some Qualifiers) carry specific usage notes and ‘see also’ references. Sometimes these are listed under a broad Category (e.g. at level 1 or 2 in the hierarchy) but they apply to all Categories listed hierarchically under the broad Category. The usage notes give important and useful information about what is covered by a heading, and how it should be used in conjunction with other *Thema* values to make full use of the scheme and maintain consistency. The ‘see also’ references point the user to other related *Thema* values that may be appropriate instead of, or as well as, the value under consideration.

The scope notes were updated in version 1.3 to add standard indicators of what type of note. The main ones are now: 1) Class here: alternative headings or common search terms; 2) Use for: further guidance to what can be classified under this heading; 3) Use with: suggested combinations of codes; 4) See also: cross-references to other categories that should be considered when categorising.

**Rule 5: Add Qualifiers whenever appropriate.**

The Qualifiers are a key feature of the *Thema* scheme structure and provide great flexibility, enabling the expression of a vast range of subjects with a comparatively small number of values. Note that the Qualifiers are associated with the book as a whole and not linked directly with a specific Category, although the link between Category and Qualifier is often implicit (e.g. Language learning material and Language Qualifiers, travel guides and Place Qualifiers etc). As with Categories, assign the most specific Qualifier values that are applicable (including National Extensions where available), and use as many as are required (see Notes A and B below).

**Rule 6: Consider Context**

Always view and consider specific headings in the context of the scheme as a whole. Sometimes a heading may seem appropriate when viewed alone, but its location in the
scheme may indicate connotations that are not appropriate – always look at the ‘parent’ and ‘ancestor’ headings of a specific code in the hierarchy. This principle is particularly pertinent to selecting between similar headings that indicate different treatments of related subject matter (e.g. works for specialist or general readers, science or industry, adults or children, etc). See the Section Summary below.

Notes

Note A: Because of the hierarchical nature of the codes, it is an error to use ‘high-level’ codes in conjunction with lower level codes denoting specific subjects. With the specific Category QDHR3 ‘Pragmatism’ for example, it is not usually appropriate to add all or any of the preceding codes QDHR, QDH, QD or indeed Q. The fact that the subject is an aspect of QD ‘Philosophy’ is implicit in the QDHR3 code. Similarly, if assigning Geographical Qualifier 1HFGA ‘Ethiopia’, it is not appropriate to assign also 1H to indicate that country is in Africa, and so on.

On the other hand, if the book is about modern philosophy as a whole, with a chapter on Pragmatism, another on Phenomenology and a third on Positivism, etc., the correct code to apply would be the broader QDHR, not QDHR3 and QDHR5 and QDHR7.

Note B: There is no defined upper limit of the number of Subject Category values or Qualifier values that may be assigned to an individual book product record, and multiple values must be allowed for the scheme to function effectively. It is suggested that a maximum of five of each type would more than sufficiently cover most circumstances – but this does not mean that users should aim to assign five Categories to every book. Most books need significantly fewer categories, and if a single Category captures the subject of the book perfectly, there is no need for anything further.

4b. Section summary – Subject Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes beginning A</th>
<th>THE ARTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>Specialist and some General Adult; prefer W* codes for practical and hobbyist approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifiers</td>
<td>Particularly STYLE, and others as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes beginning C</th>
<th>LANGUAGE &amp; LINGUISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>Specialist and General Adult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifiers</td>
<td>Particularly LANGUAGE, and others as appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Features</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes beginning</td>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>BIOGRAPHY, LITERATURE &amp; LITERARY STUDIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>FICTION &amp; RELATED ITEMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>REFERENCE, INFORMATION &amp; INTERDISCIPLINARY SUBJECTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>SOCIETY &amp; SOCIAL SCIENCES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>ECONOMICS, FINANCE, BUSINESS &amp; MANAGEMENT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>LAW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes beginning</td>
<td>Subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>MEDICINE &amp; NURSING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>HISTORY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>MATHEMATICS &amp; SCIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>PHILOSOPHY &amp; RELIGION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>EARTH SCIENCES, GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, PLANNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>SPORTS &amp; ACTIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>COMPUTING &amp; INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Codes beginning V
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HEALTH, RELATIONSHIPS &amp; PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifiers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Features</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Codes beginning W
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIFESTYLE, HOBBIES &amp; LEISURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifiers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Features</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Codes beginning X
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRAPHIC NOVELS, COMIC BOOKS, CARTOONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifiers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Features</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Codes beginning Y
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN’S, TEENAGE &amp; EDUCATIONAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Treatment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifiers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Features</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4c. Section summary – Qualifiers
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nat Extensions</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Thema 1.3, Basic User Instructions

### Codes beginning 2 LANGUAGE

**Use**
To indicate the language(s) to which the book content applies – such as a linguistics or literary studies work, phrasebook or dictionary, etc.; that is, the language a book is about, not necessarily the language it is written in.
(Do not use: to indicate the language of the text itself)
(Do not use: for fiction & literature texts, to indicate the literary tradition of the work e.g. Spanish literature)

**Nat Extensions**
Available for sub-divisions of languages or smaller regional languages

---

### Codes beginning 3 TIME PERIOD

**Use**
To indicate the time period range of book content – such as for a history book, memoir or biography, historical fiction, etc.
(Do not use: to indicate the year of an annual, road atlas, travel guide, conference proceedings, etc.)
(Do not use: to indicate the first publication date of a work, e.g. of classic fiction or literature)

**Nat Extensions**
Typically available for participating countries

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### Codes beginning 4 EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE

**Use**
To indicate the curriculum, examination or level for which educational material is specifically designed – such as school textbooks, language learning coursework, revision and study aids, vocational training material.
(Do not use: to indicate educational institutions that are the subject of a book, e.g. history of a school or university)

**Nat Extensions**
Typically available for participating countries

---

### Codes beginning 5 INTEREST AGE & SPECIAL INTEREST

**Use**
To indicate a variety of characteristics relating to content: the particular reading age or level (especially for children’s books); related events (e.g. religious or public holidays); groups of people that book content is related to, and/or, in some cases, specifically intended for (e.g. for women; relating to religious & ethnic groups, Gays & Lesbians, etc.); and to indicate explicit content.
Pay particular attention to the scope notes for 5J* and 5P* codes

**Nat Extensions**
Some present for holidays and groups & cultures

---

### Codes beginning 6 STYLE

**Use**
To indicate the particular style of artistic or creative expression covered by book content – such as books on art, architecture, music, literary studies – or exemplified by fiction & literature texts, e.g. use 6RA with DC* to indicate Romantic poetry

**Nat Extensions**
Not applicable (all codes are shared values)
5. Dissemination and communication of Thema Categories and Qualifiers

In ONIX 3.0, a book about a particular artistic school of late 19th Century French painting might be classified and communicated like this:

```xml
<!-- ***** ONIX 3.0 ***** -->
<Subject>
  <MainSubject/>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>93</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
  <SubjectCode>AGA</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
<Subject>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>93</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
  <SubjectCode>AFCL</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
<Subject>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>94</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
  <SubjectCode>1DD-FR-FB</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
<Subject>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>96</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
  <SubjectCode>3MNQX</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
<Subject>
  <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>99</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
  <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
  <SubjectCode>6SV</SubjectCode>
</Subject>

This subject classification might be accompanied by keywords such as ‘Pont Aven’ or ‘Post-impressionist’, ‘name as subject’ composites for Paul Gauguin and Émile Bernard, and in this case, it might also be useful for details of the target audience to distinguish between popular and more academic treatments of the subject. This example is taken from the ONIX 3.0 Implementation and Best Practice Guide.
In ONIX 2.1, there are only minor differences: the first <Subject> composite would use <MainSubject> instead of <Subject> and <MainSubjectSchemeIdentifier> instead of <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>, and it would omit the <MainSubject/> flag:

```xml
<!-- ***** ONIX 2.1 ***** -->
<MainSubject>
    <MainSubjectSchemeIdentifier>93</MainSubjectSchemeIdentifier>
    <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
    <SubjectCode>AGA</SubjectCode>
</MainSubject>
<Subject>
    <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>93</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
    <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
    <SubjectCode>AFCL</SubjectCode>
</Subject>
<Subject>
    <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>94</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
    <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
    <SubjectCode>1DDF-FR-FB</SubjectCode>
    <!-- 1DDF-FR-FB= Finistère -->
    <!-- note 1DDF = France if the national extension is unknown -->
</Subject>
<Subject>
    <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>96</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
    <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
    <SubjectCode>3MNQX</SubjectCode>
    <!-- 3MNQX = c 1880 to c 1889 -->
</Subject>
<Subject>
    <SubjectSchemeIdentifier>99</SubjectSchemeIdentifier>
    <SubjectSchemeVersion>1.3</SubjectSchemeVersion>
    <SubjectCode>6SV</SubjectCode>
    <!-- 6SV = Synthetism -->
</Subject>
```

As with ONIX 3.0, keywords, ‘name as subject’ and audience details should ideally also be included.
Thema code values or headings may of course be transmitted between trading partners in other message formats, displayed on websites, and used in catalogues and in promotional material. Headings may be displayed in any language as appropriate, but to increase intelligibility and interoperability, it is always useful to display the code along with any Thema heading.

Howard Willows
Nielsen, and initial chair of the Thema ISC

Graham Bell, Alex Ingram, Chris Saynor
EDItEUR

April 2018